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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000956

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR BRIAN WALCH
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR MICHELLE GAVIN
LILONGWE FOR POLITICAL, HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH MALAWI CHARGE TO ZIMBABWE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES A. RAY FOR REASONS 1.4 B,D

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Malawi-Zimbabwe relations are complicated by the presence of over two million Malawians in Zimbabwe, most working in farming and mining. The president of Malawi adopts a hands-off policy in SADC to avoid provoking Harare and causing the expulsion of Malawians which could have a devastating impact on the country's fragile economy. Over half of the Malawians in Zimbabwe are undocumented, creating a potential humanitarian crisis, and those who work on large farms are severely impacted by the farm seizures. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) I met with Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Veronica Chidothe-Tasosa on December 4 at the Malawian Embassy. She said that the main function of Malawi's mission here is to look after the more than two million Malawians who reside in Zimbabwe. Many of them work in agriculture and mining, and are descendants of people relocated here from then Nyasaland when the region was under British rule. She said that there are so many Malawians here that on the road, "every five people you meet, one is likely to be Malawian." Because of Malawi's rules on citizenship, those who are born outside the country and do not establish a physical presence before they reach the age of 22, are not entitled to citizenship papers. Unfortunately, she said, in Zimbabwe, those who are low income farm workers (especially those who work on white-owned farms) are not given Zimbabwean documents. She estimates that there are about one million people in this undocumented category. Establishing their identity and entitlement to Malawian citizenship is a difficult task.

¶3. (C) The presence of so many Malawians in Zimbabwe, which is separated from Malawi by only 200 KM or so of Mozambique, is a complicating factor in the bilateral relationship. With a fragile economy and a population of 14 million to take care of, Malawi fears that angering Zimbabwe could cause the expulsion of Malawians. This would have a devastating impact on Malawi's economy. For this reason, Malawi's president takes a hands-off approach to SADC meetings involving Zimbabwe, sending his foreign minister to deal instead. Malawi also does not make public statements critical of Mugabe or ZANU-PF, even in the face of Harare's failure to pay for several tons of food Lilongwe shipped here.

¶4. (C) Chidothe-Tasosa said that the Malawian farm workers suffer acutely from the ZANU-PF farm seizures. While Harare is willing to provide identity documents to Malawians who do well economically, those with low incomes don't get papers. Because they are ethnically and culturally different, when they are dispossessed, they are also not accepted into rural social welfare groups. This creates a potential humanitarian disaster that keeps the Malawian embassy here on edge.

15. (C) COMMENT: With a population estimated at 9 - 12 million, Zimbabwe's demographics are interesting. While Malawians probably account for the majority of non-Zimbabweans in the country, there is likely to be a significant percentage of people from other neighbors. While a lot of our focus has been on the impact on Zimbabweans of ZANU-PF's wrong-headed policies, this is a dimension of the problem that probably merits further study. Should Mugabe, in a fit of pique at his neighbor, decide to expel Malawians, it would cause untold suffering and really damage Malawi's economy. It would cause untold suffering and really damage Malawi's economy. END COMMENT.

RAY